



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



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Children's Legislation Adopted by the 2006 Connecticut General Assembly

Children emerged as a top priority of Connecticut lawmakers this year, with the General Assembly adopting some of the most far-reaching and cutting-edge legislation in the country.

The most important act revolutionizes the state's approach to spending on children, turning the focus toward proven prevention programs and away from more costly crisis spending. Other legislation raises the bar on school nutrition, improves the delivery of youth services, adds funding for after-school programs, brings more resources to bear on early reading skills and school readiness programs, bolsters parent engagement in schools, and addresses a variety of health needs.

Below are summaries of the legislation. For more information, contact the Connecticut Commission on Children at (860) 240-0290 or visit our website, at www.cga.ct.gov/coc. For bill language, go to the Connecticut General Assembly website, at www.cga.ct.gov.



Budgeting that Saves Dignity *and* Dollars

An Act Concerning State Investment in Prevention and Child Poverty Reduction

This landmark legislation puts Connecticut in the vanguard of intelligent investment in our young people. Traditionally, the state puts its money into programs that react to children and youth in crisis. Spending that prevents crises – such as investment in early education, after-

school programs, immunization, and vocational-training opportunities – accounts for less than 3 percent of state spending. This legislation sets a goal of raising that share to 10 percent by 2020. It also:

- Requires a report on prevention spending to be included in the governor's proposed budget, which is offered every two years. This report must indicate the state's progress toward the 10 percent goal; and
- Creates a Child Poverty and Prevention Council and assigns it the tasks of establishing prevention goals and measuring the outcomes of prevention programs. The Council also absorbs the work and goals of the Child Poverty Council, created in 2004.

HB 5254 – Awaiting governor's signature

What makes this legislation necessary?

- Every dollar invested in prenatal care saves \$3.38 in the cost of caring for low birth weight infants. (*Source: U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee on Youth, Children, and Families.*)
- Every dollar invested in preschool in Connecticut produces a return on investment of \$18.39. (*United Way of Connecticut.*)
- Every dollar spent on quality after-school programs produces a return a return on investment ranging from \$2.19 to \$3.22 – not including the significant savings realized from lower crime. (*Fight Crime: Invest in Kids.*)

Raising the Bar on School Nutrition

An Act Concerning Healthy Food and Beverages in School

This legislation – the strongest of its kind in the nation – attacks the epidemic of child obesity on several fronts:

- It allows only water, milk, and 100 percent fruit juice to be sold in the vending machines and cafeterias of Connecticut public schools starting July 1. Within days of the measure's passage, the nation's largest beverage companies agreed to withdraw soda and sports drinks from school vending machines throughout the country. The Connecticut legislation goes farther, however, by specifying what beverages may be sold.
- It offers public schools an incentive to offer healthy food. Every year, the State Department of Education will publish a set of nutrition guidelines; schools in the



National School Lunch Program that offer food in accordance with the guidelines will see their per-pupil reimbursement for school lunches increase by 10 cents.

Public Act No. 06-63 – Awaiting governor’s signature

What makes this legislation necessary?

- Approximately 9% of Connecticut students in grades 9 to 12 are overweight.
- In some Connecticut communities up to 25% of children are overweight.
- More than 3,000 people in Connecticut die each year from obesity and its complications. (Commission on Children testimony submitted to the legislature's, Select Committee on Children, February 23, 2006)

Improving the delivery of youth services

An Act Concerning Youth Policy

Connecticut already offers a wide array of programs to youth between the ages of 12 and 21, but this legislation will coordinate it, ensuring common goals and accountability. Specifically, the legislation:

- Establishes a Youth Futures Committee, led by the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission at the Office of Workforce Competitiveness. It will develop a comprehensive policy for making better use of state resources that assist youth age 12 and up; and
- Sets common goals for youth programs, including improved school attendance, greater high school graduation rates, more participation in postsecondary school education and job-skills programs, full employment for youth not enrolled in educational programs, more opportunities for public service, stable and safe housing for all youth, access to quality mental and physical health providers, and greater opportunities to develop leadership and mentoring skills.

HB 5532 – Awaiting governor’s signature

What makes this legislation necessary?

- In 2004, Connecticut’s cumulative dropout rate stood at 8.8 percent. In the districts considered most at-risk (ERG I), the rate exceeded 20 percent. (*Connecticut Department of Education.*)

Adding Funds to After-School Programs and Youth Employment

State Budget for Fiscal Years 2006-2008

Children are most at-risk of falling into delinquency in the hours immediately after school. A good after-school program gives them a haven – and a place for growth. Recognizing this, the legislature added to the state budget:

- \$5 million for after-school programs, with \$3.1 million going to the Department of Education and \$1.4 million to the Department of Social Services; and
- \$4 million for summer youth-employment programs operated by five regional agencies: Capital Workforce Partners, based in Hartford; the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board Inc., based in Waterbury; the Regional Workforce Development Board of Greater New Haven; the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, based in Franklin; and the Workplace Inc., based in Bridgeport.

What makes this legislation necessary?

- Children in after school programs demonstrate improved school attendance, do their homework more often and better, learn to respect people different from themselves and develop better conflict resolution and social skills. (*National Center for Community Education & the Afterschool Alliance.*)

Bringing More Resources to Bear on Early Reading Skills

An Act Implementing the Provisions of the Budget Concerning Education



More than 60 percent of Connecticut's fourth-graders fail to meet the state proficiency level in reading, and this legislation aims to correct that. For starters, it requires reading coaches to work with teachers at schools that participate in the state's Early Reading Success program, which provides full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes, and reading instruction in the state's neediest districts. It's crucial for children to develop strong reading skill as early as possible, and the coaches – working with teachers – will bring more expertise to the mission. In addition, the legislation:

- Requires school districts to report their progress in closing the achievement gap in reading, including providing data and indicating how it is used to guide professional development and the coaching process;

- Focuses early intervention in grades 1 through 3 and requires ongoing assessment and attendance at summer school;
- Requires students in grades 4 through 6 to attend summer school if they are not reading at grade level; and
- Specifies that students in grades 1 through 3 who are not reading at grade level shall not be promoted when all interventions have failed.

Public Act No. 06-135 – Awaiting governor’s signature

Note: Improving early reading skills is also targeted in the state budget, which allocates \$150,000 to hire a reading specialist administrator, or “reading czar” at the State Department of Education. The budget also earmarks an additional \$19.7 million for the 19 towns classified as Priority School Districts: Ansonia, Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, East Hartford, Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Norwich, Putnam, Stamford, Waterbury, West Haven, and Windham.

What makes this legislation necessary?

- Six in 10 (62%) Connecticut fourth-graders are not proficient in reading. (*2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress.*)

Bringing More Resources to Bear on School Readiness

An Act Implementing the Provisions of the Budget Concerning Education

Preparing young children for school allows them to get more out of the classroom experience and catches potential learning problems early. Both of those outcomes mean long-term savings for the taxpayer. This legislation:

- Increases state grants for school readiness by \$8 million, with \$3.5 million allocated to Connecticut’s poorest seven Educational Reference Group (ERG) towns: Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury, and Windham;
- Earmarks another \$535,000 to add five additional severe-needs schools to the program;
- Requires all school readiness programs to be accredited within three years of commencement, or face loss of funding; and



- Allows the Department of Education to use unexpended school-readiness funds for developmental evaluations or assessments of kindergarten students.

Public Act No. 06-135 – Awaiting governor’s signature

What makes this legislation necessary?

- In school readiness preschool programs there are substantively fewer retentions in kindergarten and first grade, fewer school absences and higher scores reported on concepts in print, reading and mathematics assessments.



Bolstering Parent Engagement in Schools

An Act Concerning Parent Involvement

This legislation highlights the vital role parents play in education by including them in the school profile reports that school districts must file each year. Specifically, it requires superintendents to summarize parental involvement in the narrative portions of the reports and indicate what steps they’ve taken to increase parent participation.

Public Act No. 06-167 – Awaiting governor’s signature

Addressing Health Needs

An Act Concerning Developmental Needs of Children and Youth with Cancer

This legislation requires public and private insurance providers to cover neuron-psychological baseline testing as part of standard of care for children with leukemia.

Public Act No. 06-131 – Awaiting governor’s signature

Home Visitation in the State Budget for Fiscal Years 2006-2008

The home visitation and support program operated by the Children’s Trust Fund will be expanded to all 29 Connecticut birthing hospitals, thanks to \$6.7 million in new funding next year. New funding will also allow the city of New Haven to provide intensive home-visitation services to 250 families experiencing their first births.

An Act Concerning Bullying Policies in Schools and Notices Sent to Parents or Legal Guardians

This legislation requires schools to create anti-bullying policies, along with ways for students to become aware of the policies and to report bullying to teachers and other school personnel anonymously. It also:

- Allows parents to file written reports of bullying to school officials, who must deal with them individually;
- Allows parents who aren't living with their children to receive information on bullying incidents.

Public Act No. 06-115– Awaiting governor's signature

